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DEPT FOR AF/C, DRL  
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KAMPALA FOR FREDRICKS  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA ACTION OFFICERS  
EUCOM FOR J5-A AFRICA DIVISION AND POLAD YATES

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [CM](#) [CT](#)  
SUBJECT: CAMEROON: M'BORORO REFUGEE TRAIL OF TEARS POURS  
ACROSS CAR BORDER (C O R R E C T E D C O P Y)

REF: A. STATE 38658  
[1](#)B. YAOUNDE 295  
[1](#)C. YAOUNDE 409  
[1](#)D. YAOUNDE 503

This message is corrected to add additional addressees.

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. Refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) are crossing Cameroon's eastern border in increasingly large numbers. They are the victims of escalating violence, and their situation has worsened despite continued aid from NGOs. Aid operations are impeded by the tenuous security situation, customs, funding problems, and the scattered locations of the refugees over difficult terrain. End Summary.

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Refugee Population Grows by 30% in Five Months  
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[1](#)2. (U) Embassy team met with UNHCR reps in Bertoua and visited M'bororo refugee sites at Ndokayo and Garoua-Boulai in Cameroon's East Province along the border with the Central African Republic (CAR) on July 19 to follow up on reports of increased refugee migration since the UNHCR's Joint Assessment Mission in February. UNHCR representative Jacques Franquin confirmed on August 2 that the number of registered refugees is now 26,091 (6,859 households), an increase within a period of five months of nearly 30 percent over the 20,383 registered as of February. The UNHCR rep in Bertoua told Poloff on July 19 that the refugees are arriving daily, "completely destitute," and refugees who spoke to the Embassy team said they expected more to come. UNHCR has registered entire villages that fled the CAR en masse.

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Malnutrition Rampant  
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[1](#)3. (U) In addition, the UNHCR rep in Bertoua told Poloff that the number of children dying from malnutrition had increased dramatically; in the town of Gbiti alone, there were 41 mortalities. Poloff spoke to one woman in Ndokayo who had lost nine out of 10 children, and many of the inhabitants there said they had lost family members. The UNHCR rep said that he believed these deaths were all related to malnutrition. Although not a trained medical observer,

Poloff noted the appearance of the children was visibly worse than those seen during the February JAM visit, where the malnutrition confirmed by medical examiners was not apparent to an untrained observer. Medical care has been made available to refugees. Poloff visited a hospital in Ndokayo, where staff said they treated dozens of refugees free of charge every day, though the hospital was empty at the time of the visit. One bedridden man in Ndokayo said he was unable to walk to the infirmary because of his illness, but would do so later.

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Increasing Violence  
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14. (U) The level of violence attending the influx of refugees and the bandits who pursue them is reported to be increasing, and many have lost family members. There are more reports of hostages killed, refugees are arriving with fewer resources, and the refugees reported the use of torture to extort information from victims. One man said he had been dragged by the neck, and another had the tips of his ears cut off and the fingers of his right hand burned off. Poloff spoke to one Baya man who was living with the M'bororo refugees in Garoua-Boulai who said that although the M'bororo are the favorite targets of the bandits, they will also torture local Baya in order to make them reveal where the M'bororo are located. The Baya, another ethnic group overlapping the same areas as the M'bororo in CAR and Cameroon, make up about 25 percent of the refugee population, according to UNHCR. A Cameroonian M'bororo who tried to work in CAR told Poloff he was harassed out of the country, arriving at the border literally naked.

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15. (U) In addition, Embassy contacts reported in April that there was an increase in gang activity, theft, drunkenness, prostitution (and attendant STDs), and orphans in the Bertoua area as a result of the influx, and that at least four heads of families had committed suicide as a result of losing their cattle. Some of this loss they attributed to an unusually long dry season that resulted in the loss of an estimated 100,000 head of cattle in the areas of Bertoua, Garoua-Boulai, Meiganga, Ngoundal, Tibati, Banyo, and as far away as the Northwest Province. The UNHCR rep told Poloff that even the cattle that remain cannot be used or sold, because they are needed to rebuild the herds.

16. (U) Residents of Bertoua told Poloff that they fear burglary by bandits coming in from the CAR, although a Cameroonian Rapid Intervention Brigade (BIR, French acronym) is active in the area and has reportedly captured several of the bandits.

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Friction with Locals  
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17. (U) Friction between local residents and refugees has been reported, although relations are generally good. The UNHCR rep said that a local chief in Ndokayo has been very supportive. Chiefs in four zones inform UNHCR whenever someone arrives, although newcomers have complained about problems with registration. A local merchant told Poloff that prices have not risen, but his business has increased. Local residents from this impoverished area ask why they cannot receive the same goods and care as the refugees. The M'bororo also compete for grazing land, and their cattle harm the crops of local farmers. There were reports that theft of crops by refugees, some of them starving children, had become rampant, but there have been no reported arrests. Poloff was told that some law enforcement officials intimidate refugees and sometimes seize the identity cards they need to obtain food assistance.

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Aid Sufficient but Facing Obstacles  
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¶18. (U) Relief operations face considerable obstacles, but aid has begun to reach the refugees, according to UNHCR. Aid operations are impeded by the tenuous security situation, customs, funding needs, and the scattered locations of the refugees over difficult terrain. UNHCR, in tandem with the World Food Program (WFP), Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF, Doctors Without Borders), the Red Cross, and other groups, schedules regular deliveries of food and medical care. A WFP food shipment arrived in Douala July 15, but was held up by customs for 15 days. A major distribution by four teams of relief workers is scheduled for August 8, and four subsequent distributions are planned through December 2007. Food assistance consists of corn, beans, oil, sugar, salt, and protein biscuits. MSF also provides hydratants to combat infantile diarrhea. Other items supplied to the refugees include blankets, mattresses, jerrycans, soap, and hygienic kits. In addition, there are programs to supply 15 wells, and medical supplies to the district medical centers.

¶19. (U) The Ministry of Public Health is working with UNHCR, MSF, and UNICEF to address the problem of malnutrition. The UNHCR rep in Bertoua said that the assistance is substantial -- thousands of tons -- and would be sufficient to cover the needs of the refugees there, even though the need has increased dramatically. However, UNHCR is requesting 200,000 USD in additional funding. There are some missionaries who have been providing food aid as well, including a recent delivery of ten tons of food and other aid to Garoua-Boulai. Nevertheless, the refugees say they have become frustrated with the slow pace of delivery of aid from the UNHCR.

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Comment: Trouble Afoot  
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¶10. (U) If the violence in CAR continues unabated, the ensuing influx of refugees could be massive and become a

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destabilizing factor. Word to kin in CAR that assistance is available in Cameroon is likely to continue to draw them, and anyone remaining in CAR may be targeted by the bandits, who are in turn following the refugees into Cameroon. This migration will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to stop. The fact that the bandits are entering towns indicates an increased boldness, perhaps out of desperation on their part.

It may also indicate that the resources of their preferred victims, the M'bororo, have been depleted, and they are searching for new victims. Even though border checkpoints are strict, the border itself is extremely porous, especially to people traveling on foot. There are M'bororo and Baya resident in both CAR and Cameroon, so it is impossible to distinguish native from foreigner by appearance. In addition to adding to the potential for social unrest, the largely Muslim refugee population also changes the demographic of the area. In February, Poloff learned that the number of mosques in Bertoua had gone from two to 13. Refugee children do not ordinarily attend school, but one M'bororo told Poloff he sends his children to a local madrasa. Although no religious tensions have been reported, a local official and an NGO rep told Poloff that opposition party UNDP tried to register M'bororo to vote in the July 22 elections, in contravention of Cameroonian law. While these attempts were unable to sway the election, they could serve to polarize communities along political lines. End Comment.

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